

# YOU ARE NOT ALONE

By **Jacob Clifton** | Season 3 | Episode 1 | Aired on 10.04.2007

*Season 3* - One last breeze through the TARDIS before the shops close up for the year, goodbye to the season that nearly broke us all, and the rest was just fantastic.

## I: Buffalo Buffalo Buffalo Buffalo Buffalo Buffalo Buffalo

So out of nowhere, Bootstrap Maggie goes, "Buffalo buffalo buffalo, buffalo buffalo buffalo buffalo." Meaning, those buffalo who are buffaloes by buffalo often turn out to buffalo other buffalo, who are also historically buffaloes by their fellow buffalo. What it means is that everybody lies to everybody else -- that there's always another head on the totem pole, below yours. And above. What it means is that "buffalo" is the password to language: verb, object, subject, noun, adjective. To buffalo, I buffalo, you buffalo, we buffalo. And if I'm tricking you, and you're tricking somebody, if we're all the buffalo that buffalo buffalo, we're all in the same trap. The only way out is to rise: to tell the truth. Bliss would call the buffalo a symbol of the Doctor, because Bliss thinks everything is a symbol of the Doctor, and vice versa. Bless Bliss, we used to say. Bless Bliss. But she's right about that, too: he's the key you turn in the lock called everything, the password to the whole world. Verb, object, subject, noun, adjective: the Doctor doctors, I doctor, you doctor, we doctor. He's the buffalo. The last of them.

Season 1 of *Doctor Who* is the Hero's Quest -- a retelling of that human tendency to reach for experience of the divine, and the human tendency to reach it. Season 2 of *Doctor Who* is the same story told fourteen ways: the human tendency to fuck it up and forget what we're here for, and the human requirement to fall away from God and enter the real world again. And Season 3 of *Doctor Who* is a lot of things, but what makes it stand apart is the lack of Rose, and its resistance to substituting Martha for her. Season 1 was Rose's story; Season 2 was the story of all Companions, which is to say all people who have seen or wished for miracles, which is to say, all people. But Season 3 is a story about Doctor himself, and that is I think key to the season as a whole: just because the Companion was designed to be our entry point doesn't mean the Whoniverse is restricted to that lens.

I think maybe we were "trained" to think of the Companion's POV as the most accessible, and thus to become batshit shippers, but the show takes a step sideways in Season 3, and it makes Martha a bit queasy to watch,

if you're not prepared to jump away from the Companion thing. I love that the show can concentrate on such radically different aspects of the Doctor's world, because it's vast and beautiful and full of history -- but I think this is also pretty confusing at first, like changing TARDISes midstream. Actually, you could even say Season 1 of *Torchwood* is not "about" Gwen or Jack, but about the icky relationship between people and technology, people and the edge of superiority, people and the Other. It fails, spectacularly, and I love it -- but it fails not because it's about the wrong stuff or does what it's "about" wrong: it's just that we were trained by Rose to think the New Series were about particular characters.

In those terms, then, Season 3 is the natural next chapter in a forty-year romance between the Doctor and the Earth; it's a postscript for heartbreak. It's an examination of medical ethics. It's an examination of the role of the individual in the workings of religion. It's the story of a girl who pledged her life to help the world, and how she did it, in a Gospel told by and for the Doctor himself. It's a story of reversals and dark mirrors: defining the Doctor by precisely defining his opposite, and then resolving the difference; by resolving the question of power and its responsibilities by upgrading simple human power to a near-divine level, then giving Him a human heart. It's a biography -- actually, it's more precise to call it a working *pathology* -- for God. Most interestingly -- to me, at least -- is that it's the next step in what seems to be an ongoing project by Russell Davies to ask a very simple question: why do atheists ([Joss](#), [RTD](#), Ursula K. LeGuin) write better religious fiction than the faithful? Or, really, why do they do it at all?

## II: The Runaway Bride

The Christmas Special begins with a repeated element from earlier seasons. In this season, more than ever, it pays dividends to pay attention to repeating images and concepts. We begin with a zoom into Earth, the fourth such in the new series. [The first time](#), we said hello to a new friend; [the last time](#), we lost her. And [in the middle](#), we traded one Doctor for another, and said hello again. This time it's a goodbye. "The Runaway Bride" is a story about coming to terms with grief, finding the strength to admit that sometimes hope and love aren't enough; and it's a story about finding peace.

The Companion for this story, played by the wonderful Catherine Tate, starts us off, walking down the aisle, neon family either side. She's always been stable, always kept her valence shell full, non-reactive;

until she met Lance, until she met our Doctor, she was odorless, colorless, monatomic -- but that's not why her name is Donna Noble. In every chapter of this story, you'll find a hymn: sometimes they're more hidden than others. Sometimes they're profane. But this is the Christmas Special, and so this is Donna Noble: give us peace. The first thing she does is open the doors of the TARDIS wide, and let some air in.

After Donna's been kidnapped by the **pilot fish Santabots**, there's an excellent scene in which the TARDIS physically comes bouncing down the highway, careening after her. They showed this at Children In Need; I watched it on the web, and it was amazing: the TARDIS comes careening down the motorway, music so crazy you couldn't really hear what was going on, on the screen. But in the crowd: everybody in the whole concert hall, gasping at once, breathing with a single breath. It was huge. The moment made me understand *Doctor Who* fandom a whole lot more. Think about the power of that moment: when the TARDIS comes into the shot, and the whole world starts cheering, all of them in love with exactly the same thing, at exactly the same time. And from one kidnapper to another, the Doctor asks Donna to jump. She asks if his "friend," whose name he hasn't yet said, trusted him too. Did she jump? Did she ever.

Being a normal person -- a person who didn't notice the Santa Fish or the Slitheen or any of that shit -- doesn't make you less. It makes you Donna, which you already were. "The Oncoming Storm" isn't bullshit mythology, it's the way of things. But just like the Time War, which hurt everybody but the normal people, the Doctor comes in waves. There's a trees/forest analogy running through the season, and Donna starts it here. The trees are made of forest, and the forest is made of trees. No trees, no forest: but without a forest, the wind can take you down, one by one.

The Doctor gives Donna a ring to keep her hidden from the pilot fish, but soon figures out that her disappearance arose from her body's saturation by huon particles, a source of energy that hasn't existed for billions of years, and which was being manufactured again by Torchwood, in its base below the Thames. It's something so powerful that Gallifrey was afraid of it, and Torchwood thought it could handle it. She was getting them in her coffee, and they can't be biodamped by a simple ring. Which is to say, the thing she thought would make her special is now the thing that can't stop her from being special. Which is to say, she's not a replacement Companion; she's a mirror: The Last Of The Singletons, so desperate to hear those four little words that she can't see the danger signs. So afraid of being alone.

In contrast to the cuppa that saved Ten and the world a year ago, the huon was administered through Donna's coffee. Later, the Doctor takes Donna back 4.6 billion years, when the Earth was waiting to form: a Rachnoss ship drifts into the system and begins to pull debris around itself, attracting dust and light and growing mass. I mean to say that at the center of the Earth is a secret: something dark, scary, chthonic, something forgotten, something you can't wrap your head around. Something that's scary because you can't understand it, because it looks ugly to you, because you don't have enough information, because you're not comfortable: something that makes you shudder without knowing why. Does it make you love Earth less? It shouldn't.

When the Doctor enters, dressed as a Santa, the Empress of the Rachnoss immediately sees through the disguise, of course: you can't do seemings in front of stuff from the depths. They're about the ugly truth, about teeth and blood; they don't have the imagination to be fooled. The Doctor makes the Empress an offer: he'll find a planet for her and her children, if she ends it. If she and her children give up their birthright, if they agree to give up what is theirs, he will relent. But shadows can't grow brighter by the shouting of the light, so the Empress declines. What happens next is her own doing, the Doctor impresses upon her, and he tells her his world. It is far away and long since gone, but its name lives on. Gallifrey. Unspoken Gallifrey, silver-leafed trees and burnt orange sky, deep red grass. Gallifrey, the shining world of the Seven Systems. Gallifrey of the Untempered Schism. Gallifrey, the murderers of the Rachnoss. The Empress screams in rage and fear, the oldest enemy back again, killing her children. The Doctor takes some ornament bombs and tosses them into the walls and pipes, bringing the river into the base, into the pit. The room is full of fire and flood, and the Empress screams. Donna begs him to stop, tries to give him peace, but there's no peace here. Just rage. Rage, because there's one planet in all places and times that brings him back, that gives him peace and makes him feel something. Now that Gallifrey's gone, it's home. And at the center of that planet, it turns out, is a secret. Something dark and scary, something forgotten, something you can't wrap your head around because you don't have enough information. If I give you something that looks like this

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what you're seeing is two dots and a curved line. But you're turning it human. You're reacting to what's in front of you, and there's no harm in that, but you can't forget that you're the one doing the work. Taking a god and falling in love with him. And he's just as guilty: there's a reason

they call it the arachnid reaction -- where the dots and line stay that, or turn into something worse, because you can't stand looking at something so alien as a spider or a scorpion, or a Rachnoss Empress. This is a betrayal by Earth herself, to reveal something like this at her center. To break apart the wish in front of him, after he's lost so much, and show him how horrible everything can be. How even a lonely god can have his heart broken.

Look out for the fixed points: they're anathema. The Doctor stands or dances in the heart of the storm and it turns about him. Jack is a fixed place. Rose was a fixed place, the part that kept him grounded, connected to the center. And she turned into spider babies and broke his heart. Earth full of spider babies is isomorphic to the Doctor and Rose stupidly promising they'd make it work this time: it breaks apart and bites the Doctor in the narrow ass. But Earth is also home, and he's never been good at seeing the dark side of things, so it must be the Empress that's the problem. It's not that one heart is broken, locked up on the other side of the Void; it's not that the other heart is beating twice as hard and fast. It's not that he's raging; it's just that somebody won't leave Earth alone. And luckily, he's a god. He can handle it. He can master her.

The Doctor's like fire and ice, and rage. He's like the night and the storm, and the heart of the sun: he's ancient, and forever. He burns at the center of time, and he can see the turn of the universe. He is terrible. He has two hearts, and one of them is broken, so the other one's beating twice as hard. You're a god, riding with angels: who's going to stop you? Know your enemy: that's grace, hiding and waiting to jump. And know your archangels: they're the ones bearing their double-edged swords, guarding the Garden, keeping you sane and able to grow. The Empress teleports away, back to her ship, but a Mr. Saxon orders her ship destroyed, and so it is. The Earth is defended. The Thames is dry.

Donna refuses to go on traveling with the Doctor: he's terrifying, he burns at the center of so much danger and chaos. This is not a job for a grown woman, even if Donna and the Doctor are so completely in the same situation no matter how you cut it. No matter how high/low culture you cut them, no matter how Heaven/Earth the division between them, she's the only person who can really understand what he's going through: to be the last of something you thought made up what you are. To go from being a part of the forest to being just a tree: and watching your forest bite you in the ass. And still, Donna makes a stronger choice than the Doctor does. But he does need somebody, she knows that much -- when the god's heart leaves his man's heart too far behind; when that heart

beats too loudly for him to hear anything else. He needs somebody to stop him, when his need to master takes him too far. Donna Noble asks her name, the Companion he lost, and finally: "Her name was Rose," he says, *datum pacem*. And then he's gone.

### III: Smith & Jones

We get another echo of that heartache in the first proper Martha story: a little sweet old lady turns out wrong, and the terrifyingly awesome Judoon turn out...well, not sweetness and light, but respectable, certainly. Much is made of genetic transfer, blood drinking, what's human and what's not. There's a theme for you: another woman older than time, who can't be stopped. Another nuclear secret inside what should be sweet; another dose of horror inside a simple cup.

When the Doctor appears in the hospital, sparks flying, weird time loops abounding, he's only got one working heart. Which one do you think it is? Martha CPRs the Doctor's two hearts and revives him. She remembers to work both sides, god and man: she gets them both beating again, and he saves the world. His human heart is put not in Donna's hands -- whatever she thinks, this isn't a love story -- but into her care, for the remainder. She is the shepherd of his humanity; sometimes literally. Who better to take charge of one heart? A doctor that doctors Doctors. Who better, to heal a god, or an angel, or Albion? And tonight, Donna agrees to the Doctor's petulant offer of a reward trip, into the past; he lies right to her face and through his lovely teeth about how he prefers to travel "on [his] own," and when she asks if he ever had a brother, he says he doesn't. Not anymore.

### IV: The Shakespeare Code

The Doctor and Companion take in a show, *Love's Labour's Lost*, and at its end the author announces the sequel, *Love's Labour's Won*. It's a lost play:: in the first part, four nobles swear off women, shutting down their hearts and devoting themselves to study. Which is to say, they're unwilling to get hurt again; they shut down one of their hearts, so to speak. However, a princess and her retinue appear, for diplomatic arrangements regarding Aquitaine, and the king must make a choice: to let the women in, to let the games continue, even if it means temptation. Even if, in doing his job, he risks breaking his heart again. They fall in love, four brides for four bridegrooms, and just when you think everything's okay, just when you think sometimes happy endings are possible, just when you think endings are possible, the princess's father dies. She becomes a queen. The noblemen are left alone,

promising always to love and cherish their ladies, even though they've gone beyond the veil, across the Void. Sound familiar? The nobles are required to wait in silence for a year, without companionship, in order to prove their love. It's a play about plays, a play about words, with more wordplay and word magic than any other thing William's written. Comedies end in marriages, always, and tragedies in death. *Love's Labour's Lost* is a twisted thing, requiring a sequel, for this reason: all comedy ends in marriage.

I think the way to avoid going nuts with the repetitive romance stuff between Martha and the Doctor -- which is picked up and put down like a rabbit at a birthday party all through the season and which is one of those "arcs" that *Torchwood* specializes in, telling us something one hundred times without showing us once, and then pointing to it and saying: "Development" -- is to compare this bed scene with "The Runaway Bride" and not Rose's relationship with the Doctor at all. Specifically, the forest/trees metaphor. The Doctor has, in the long stretch of time between "Doomsday" and "Bride," made a conscious decision to turn off his human heart. Donna's *pax* lies in getting him to verbalize the choice: a very "tree" act for a man who's had to go more "forest" than he's ever had to before. Martha's relationship with the Doctor becomes emblematic of his relationship with humanity, both ours and his own, which is of course mirrored perfectly in the finale: he tries to lie in bed next to us without touching, and ends up nearly dead as a result.

Gnostically, you could even say that the continued rumbling relationship issues with Martha and Jack represent a sort of attempt by the narrative itself -- the universe -- to get the Doctor to remember, or admit, that both trees and forest are equally important, so that when the time comes, he'll make the right decision. Because no matter what, it's obvious that the Doctor's being silly, if not dangerously weak, in thinking that he can just stuff his emotions away -- like the Rachnoss and the Witches, primal aspects from eons ago, that he assumes have been cast out of the Universe. ("What happens when you repress something?" It goes away? "It comes back all crazy and pissed off!")

The sign at the Elephant, the inn where William's staying, doesn't portray an elephant, because nobody knows what an elephant looks like. It's a creature out of legend, like a Time Lord, or a buffalo. William falls in love with Martha, and the Doctor falls in love with William, who can see right through the slightly psychic paper: the Doctor wants to be known, but only with half his hearts. When Martha and the Doctor lie in bed together, the Doctor talks about Rose. Needless to say, this is gross for

Martha, because she's crushing pretty hardcore, as anybody would. But there's another secret here, another hymn: once the princess's father dies, once she goes away to become a queen, once all Love's Labours have been Lost, somebody has to bear witness. The first stage of love is magic: the person glows, has superpowers, needs rescuing -- these are just the ways we put them in our story, the story we're telling about the things we need out of them that don't exist anywhere outside our heads. The first stage of love is this: so much energy on our side of the line that we can't tell where our fantasy ends and the person starts. She thinks she's in love with the Doctor, but she doesn't even know him yet. Not even the Carrionite witch Lilith can discern the Doctor's true name (although "Rose" comes close). Whether that's even possible, or advisable, is another question entirely, but it runs counter to the whole venture to answer it. The loop is closed in the final scenes of the season, when Martha accuses the Doctor of not seeing things right in front of his eyes -- which is exactly his complaint about Donna. In this way they are obverse reflections of each other.

In fact, if the Master is the outward manifestation of the Doctor's cruelest and most Old Testament desires, you could almost bookend him with Donna in this story, come to think of it: she's the lonely angel human half of the Doctor, saying a final goodbye for most of the season. It won't work for Season 4, when she returns, but there's a poetry to having the journey begin and end with such radically opposed yet still consciously mirroring aspects of the Doctor himself. I bet the Donna (the Noble?) would have beat the shit out of Saxon even better than did Martha. But we'll get there, stop moanin'.

## **V: Gridlock**

We return to New Earth once again: another repeating theme that bears investigating. **The first time**, Nine used Earth's destruction, viewed from space, to get himself and Rose on corresponding emotional levels. He was trying to tell her a story in pictures. That was Season 1, a story about Rose. **The second time**, on New Earth proper, the universe tried to tell Ten and Rose the thing it tried to tell them every week of Season 2: that even Cassandra can be redeemed, but only in giving up her fantasies of immortality. In the moment of her undoing, she is reborn and redeemed; Martha calls herself a rebound girl because she doesn't understand she's necessary right now. This time, we're looking at a story about faith *qua* faith, and we're talking about the dark and light sides of, yes, grace.



There are two kinds of faith: stupid and smart. Where the atheists fall apart is when nobody bothers to explain the difference to them, and I speak as one of them; overcoming the stupid kind of faith inevitably leads to a denigration of the smart kind, because they both look the same from the outside. There's the kind of faith that keeps you in the rat race, heading for this Utopia on the highway of life, giving up all personal determination, all free will, because somebody told you one time that it's going to get awesome as long as you don't go too low, don't reach too high, don't talk too much, don't ask questions, don't disobey. This kind of faith leads to war, cruelty, and being eaten by giant crabs. This is the kind of faith that prescribes emotions, rather than feeling them; that gives the Doctor his moment of rage at the Temple: that something as precious as Happy, as blessed as Bliss, could be bought and sold like that. But the promise of New New New New New New New New New New New New New New New York is the promise of renewal, every single time. This is the last time we'll visit.

The **continuity announcer** introduced the episode with "Next up is *Doctor Who*, but first: travel news with Sally Calypso." That's a sign that we're dealing with information, with media and received wisdom; that's a sign we're going to be playing **the long game** again -- that we'll be asked to do some of the work ourselves. References to *American Gothic*, *2000AD* ground the episode in reality, even as the ridiculous premise is taking it apart -- just like our last visit here, when metaphor overtook science. Alice and May Cassini, an elderly Boston marriage on the road, are named after the man who discovered Saturn's rings: Saturn rules the sphere of the Emperor, Trump IV, God the Father, the god of **Peter's World**, of hard truths and impossible decisions, rules and regulations; who must choose between the open hand and the closed fist, between *Chesed* and *Gevurah*, mercy and judgment, Doctor and Master. Between Peter's World and dancing for life, in the **Spirit Of The Blitz**.

Cat Nurse Nun Novice Hame has apprenticed herself to the Face of Boe, the mother and father of immortality, the opposing Face to Cassandra's stretched and mindless greed. Where Cassandra possesses bodies with her mind, Boe speaks from each to each. He sings, and when he sings, only the TARDIS could match him. His gift is the link, where Cassandra's failure was the inability to connect. So you have Cassandra, who destroys by preserving, and you have Boe, who creates by destroying. One of them is in tune with the universe; one of them isn't. One of them creates horrors out of beauty; the other creates beauty out of the natural cycle of things, horrible and wonderful. It's the same reversion from "The Long Secret" -- which is better, the God who keeps you bound, or the Devil

who's in there with you, trying to get out? Calypso means "concealer." Odysseus was trapped in stupid faith. Apocalypse means revelation. The end of the world is also the end of the Long Game, the end of deception, where things appear to be exactly what they are. Heaven on Earth. So which if these two Faces is right this time? Or are we just looking at a very large vase? It depends on your perspective.

This is the song of the Motorway, the first hymn in this chapter. It is smart faith. It is the ability to rise above the trap, to surpass and transcend Sally Calypso: "Then He'll call me some day to my home far away/ Where His glory forever I'll share/ So I'll cherish the old rugged cross/ Till my trophies at last I lay down/ I will cling to the old rugged cross/ And exchange it some day for a crown." It's not the cross, not the song, not the Face of Boe doing the work: it's them, humanity, the Motorway, building love and faith in community, in the absence of a divine answer. That's one kind of smart faith. That's the LINDA kind, which reminds you you're not alone. It's the kind of faith that gives you strength out of nowhere, the kind that even us genius atheists can't really make fun of. These are the two kinds of faith that the endgame comes down to: the last three episodes are nothing but a war between these two very different things, homonymically connected by the accident of identical spelling and connotation.

New Earth died because their Bliss was tainted; all they have now is Happy. Happy is stupid faith, but Bliss, over the counter, wasn't faith at all. The faith of the Motorway is a necessary deception created by the Face of Boe, in order to preserve life; it's not an optimal solution, but it buys New Earth enough time for a Doctor. With healing in his wings, pointing humanity, as ever, as always, eternally pointing humanity toward the skies. The Face of Boe gives of himself, shines through the gloom, gives his life essence, abandons immortality, so that humanity can make the next jump. Which is to say, the Motorway, humanity, thought they were betrayed and abandoned, but really, they're just in God's holding pattern. And the Doctor opens the sky. They rise, and Boe dies, finally.

And this is the song that they sing: "...fast falls the eventide/ The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.../ Help of the helpless, O abide with me/ Change and decay in all around I see/ O Thou who changest not, abide with me." And this is the song that they sing: "Not a brief glance I beg, a passing word/ But as Thou dwell'st with Thy disciples, Lord/ Familiar, condescending, patient, free/ Come not to sojourn, but abide with me." And this is the song that they sing: "Come not in terrors,

as the King of kings/ But kind and good, with healing in Thy wings/ Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes/ Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies." And this is the song that they sing: "Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee/ In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me." Come not to sojourn, but to abide.

The Doctor tells finally of beautiful Gallifrey, and The Last Of The Boekind, New Earth's Devil and God in one -- both terrible and wonderful; King of Kings but kind and good, healing, like a doctor would -- gives up everything to save humanity. And his last words are, "Everything has its time," and his secret is this: "You are not alone."

## **VI: Daleks in Manhattan/Evolution of the Daleks**

I don't know what the fuck is going on in this story.

The plan was to do each of the S3 recaps in a different style: "42" would be a classic '60s big-sky story like *Solaris*, with that Lem sense of being translated from Russian fifty years ago. "Human Nature" would be a provincial Boy's School setting, slightly archaic and precious, like an E.F. Benson story. A bit of Chameleon Circuitry to balance the gigantic monster novel thing made of the first two seasons. So like...

See those Daleks, right? See those Daleks? Those Daleks, see them? Right, coming over the Atlantic from Canary Wharf and itching to make pig people like Andy Pipkin but with those tusks right but then not? Right because they're building a tower to make more Daleks, like Jenny Hoff down the road with some chav and ending up in the Estate down the road with six babies in Year Eleven and I axed her why they had the pig people in, right, why do they have the pig people in, just axing a question, and she doesn't know nothing, does she? I was at the Topshop with Lise and we spotted Lily Allen beating up some chav girl and almost got into it but we were late. And then -- this is mental, man -- straightaway some slapper in love with a pig man dancing with roses and drinking ciders up at the Statue of Liberty, right up at the Statue of Liberty, innit. From France. And up in the sky there you've got lightning and the real genuine article New York 1930 like some kind of movie with Ewan MacGregor who I saw walking down the high street with a baguette and a trombone, ask Lisa if you don't believe me, and then they turn the man into a Dalek but with some shite on his head like a bag of cat's wieners wiggling. All right? And then the Doctor's DNA, right, in the whole new race of pig alien Dalek people and then they all died, and the man had nothing to say about it, but then, right, then the other Daleks turn on him because my mate from old Greece, right, where chips come from? And he said that

Diagoras was a famous atheist right like they don't believe in Christmas or the Doctor, right, he told everybody the secrets of all the Greek religions, destroyed them by sharing them and trying to teach them freedom but they just thought he was David Icke on a pogo stick so they killed him for asking questions just like this Dalek mate with the face, and then the Doctor said buggery Dalek Caan will probably come back next year but am I bothered? Am I bothered, though? You got Daleks and pig people and homeless Benetton tramps underground, and a stupid-looking Dalek-head man and you got him saying things like Time Lord DNA gives you a sense of freedom and Dalek Sek could have led them out of the darkness, and so are you disrespecting me? Are you calling me stupid? Are you disrespecting my family, though? Are you calling my mum a pig person with tusks? Are you saying she smells like the Manhattan sewers? Are you calling my dad a homeless wino? Are you saying he dresses up like the Statue of Liberty? Are you calling me a pig person? Are you looking at my face? Right, are you looking at my face? Do you see tusks? Do I look bothered? Look at my face, am I bothered? Am I bothered, though? Is any part of it bothered? Face, pig people, bothered, Daleks, David Icke, electrics, DNA, Diagoras, Daleks, bothered? Am I bothered, though?

## **VII: The Lazarus Experiment**

There's continuity here with "Evolution," in that we're interested once more in changing "what it means to be human," and vice versa, which has really been a theme throughout the season. What's human and what's alien, or divine, or simply not human, or simply inhuman. And of course, Professor Lazarus's hacked DNA is unstable, and causes him to devour those around him, because everything has its time, and his attempts to reverse time are as profane as the existence of immortals, or the Doctor's own inability to let go of the past, or the actions of Saxon, Yana, and the Master. The Doctor wears his dinner jacket from the Age of Steel, Peter's World, to another party where humans are becoming more, and less. Lazarus becomes younger, his voice higher, his needs simpler, like some creature, from Gallifrey folklore, that moves from Event Omega to Utopia, dancing to the drums of war: it's a dead end. Stupid faith: they form prayers to broken stone. Lazarus, and anyone who seeks Utopia by walking backwards, is just a cul-de-sac, continually devouring itself, turned inward, not dead but nothing like alive. "Shape without form, shade without colour, / Paralysed force, gesture without motion..." There are two kinds of endings: the kind that sing, and the kind that whimper.

And this is the song they sing: "Remember us -- if at all -- not as lost/

Violent souls, but only/ As the hollow men... Between the idea/ And the reality/ Between the motion/ And the act/ Falls the Shadow." Lazarus mentions "splitting the atom" -- as though you can divide anyone into two selves, two bodies, one good and one bad, one Doctor and one Master. As though when we look in a mirror, no matter how dark or how warped, we're seeing somebody else. As though one heart beating could stop another. Between the person you'd like to be, and the worst that you're capable of, falls the shadow. Or is it just a very large vase? Depends on your perspective.

## VIII: 42

In forty-two minutes, the whole season plays out, word and thought and deed. Visually it's a lot like "**The Satan Pit**," and could have had the same effect: a revisiting of the warning the Doctor keeps getting this season, that his human heart is the more important, for being the weaker of the two. The Doctor and Martha are cut off from the TARDIS by incredible heat; reference is made to the song "Here Comes the Sun," but the song they sing is older and more terrible: "Burn With Me." What happens to a Doctor who's forgotten how to doctor -- how to heal? What happens when his power grows too strong, when one heart outbeats the other, and there's nobody around to stop him? The whole world burns. There's a secret in the center of the sun, and it looks a lot like the monster at the center of the Earth, and they both tell the same story: sometimes the people you love hurt you, either by disappearing or by not loving you back correctly. The Saxon woman who controls Francine, Martha's mother, is credited at different times as "Sinister Woman" and "Miss Dexter." Put them together and you're clapping, or praying, or fighting. Or is she just a very large vase, too?

In those fantasy books, they have White Magic and Dark Magic and sometimes High Magic? But then Hearn goes hunting and that's Wild Magic, and that's the Doctor, and it will fuck you up no matter how beautiful it is. You can't hang out with the sun. The sun, we've seen, is terrible to his ex-wives. Glory is the new Grace -- terrible glory, like Galadriel. How do you limit the limitless? How do you tell God He's getting too big for His britches? The whole "ramp up/ramp down" thing means shite if you're God: those are just people rules. His ramp goes up forever. But that means one day he'll just be a strange lonely boy in the marketplace, you know? It won't matter if he's alone or not, because he'll be alone. So something has to knock him down again. The Third Testament: the death of God, or His complete submission.

I thought this episode presaged a very intense finale: that the Doctor would be forced by the mysterious Mr. Saxon into a situation so terrible and frightening and world-ending that he would have to pull a Bad Wolf, that he would become terrible, worse than Saxon, all Galadriel-style tainted by too much divinity and not enough humanity; that Martha would have to "stop" him *literally*, that her Quest would end in the murder of God. That what he was foretelling was his own failure, and not a rote description of the Master's actions start to finish. Which would have been interesting, to say the least. And it's not that those things didn't happen, exactly, but that they happened in the wrong order, to the wrong people, in the wrong way. I was right by being wrong, because I didn't account for the connections and love and mirroring between the Doctor and the Master that make that story workable. If you split the Doctor into two beings, light and dark; if you set them at each other, chained up by love and hate and madness, that's...pretty much exactly what happens. The word "last" is a lot like "buffalo": it can be plural or singular. Are they, the Doctor and the Master, the two last Time Lords? Or are they, together, the last one there is? Is God really just a very large vase? I like the ending of this season, a LOT, and by the time you read this you'll know whether you'll agree. But I still love this episode.

### **IX: Human Nature/The Family of Blood**

Sweet Tinkerbell Jesus, what a tremendous story. You know, I've been called a lot of things on this beat: wordy and florid, pretentious and overly earnest (I prefer to think of myself as post-ironic), and they're all true, but nobody's ever called me a particularly huge fan of the show *Doctor Who*. I don't think of myself that way. I mean, I like it, but I haven't seen most of the episodes more than once, and I never would have started watching it without the recapping assignment. Which would have sucked, because I love writing about this show, and I got to see *The Second Coming* and *Queer As Folk* and learn firsthand that Russell Davies is a wonderful man who does not hold grudges. But the #1 thing that would suck about me never knowing this show is that I wouldn't have seen this story. It's one of the best things I've ever seen on TV, and I'm including *everything* I've ever seen on TV when I say that. It is phenomenal.

Martha's mandate, to care for the Doctor's human heart, is kicked into overdrive: she's been covering for him on more than the usual emotional level for the last three months, in a time and place that would be uncomfortable for almost anybody. Taking Donna's warning to heart, the Doctor has turned himself human -- again, a theme in every episode -- in

order to hide from his vengeance. If the Aubertide Family will just die off, there will be no need for him to get Old Testament on their asses. He knows: he's like fire and ice, and rage. He's like the night and the storm, and the heart of the sun: he's ancient, and forever. He burns at the center of time, and he can see the turn of the universe. He is terrible, and wonderful, and there are risks involved with power. His heart is endangered. By falling in love, he endangers his other heart as well. And the god suffers too: the most compelling part of his *Last Temptation* vision is that everybody's safe. Companions, Smith, the soldiers and boys, and Joan: he no longer has to be a hero.

The human John Smith -- who lives on in the Doctor, just as the ten Doctors live on in Tim Latimer and John Smith -- teaches the Doctor the most important lesson: self-sacrifice. Not something gods really understand until they go human on you, historically -- that human strength is more powerful than divine strength, because one begets the other. This is where we get into sticky territory that we've already talked about with *The Second Coming*, but it's even harder to understand here, so I'll just say: absent circumstance, if the Doctor chooses his Companions based on his admiration for them -- if Companions are allowed to stay because of love -- then the Doctor could choose no more worthy a Companion than John Smith. And he knows it. Though they never speak, their relationship mirrors and foresees the end of the season, too: the Doctor heart kneels down for the executioner, so that the Master heart can be absolved.

"Let me also wear/ Such deliberate disguises/ Rat's coat, crowskin, crossed staves/ In a field/ Behaving as the wind behaves..." The scarecrows are hollow men. They take on the appearance of humanity, but are neither of it nor in it: on the face of it, they are terrifying, but inside they're empty. They're like beasts pretending that they're alive; they're like Masters pretending they don't depend on their Companions and slaves for their very existence. This is the source of the schoolboys' relief in the most compelling scene of the piece, which is recapitulation of the truth of war: mere boys, firing on straw men, tears falling from their eyes. When we talk about the drums of war, when we talk about the sound of drums, this is the truth: nobody ever wanted to be a villain, and nobody ever wanted to kill. They got there by cruel fate, and they must be loved.

We talked a lot about Restoration of the Divine, once upon a time. About Sophia; about Ahriman taking apart wishes, dreams, lies, cages, ourselves, and giving that light back. I thought the new "grace" would be

"glory," this season, and I was right -- the up- and downsides, the rise and fall -- but really, we're just back to Reclamation of the Demonic, which is the other side of what we do -- the part where we set aside the Doctor and start looking for the Master. Everything that means anything is in the darkest and most neglected corners of your house, in the places you're not sure of. In the bug rooms and the cobweb corners, those are the things that keep you from being free. But the truth is that those things belong to you, helping to make up what you are, and by ignoring them, you give them so much power that you could have for yourself, as glory. The Daleks in Manhattan couldn't love Sek, couldn't handle the Diagoras he turned into: and if they could, he would have led them into the light. What's horrible and wonderful depends a lot on your perspective. It depends on how big your house is.

The Journal of Impossible Things includes the quote *maius intra qua extra*: "What is inside is greater than what is outside." That's the TARDIS, but it's also the fob watch, and John Smith, and Martha, and Tim Latimer. And the Doctor too, though it'll take him forever to realize it. One of the most useful Gnostic concepts is theoretical: imagine that the soul doesn't rest inside the body -- that the body, and everything else, rests inside the soul. By truly experiencing oneself, Doctor and Master and Companion, Shadow and future and past, one achieves knowledge of God, which is all those things -- but only if the opposite holds true, or else you're on the solipsist bullshit wagon. Through the experience of God, or one's connection to Everything Else That There Is, can you really know where you're at, at your most central? If your soul is imagined as being of infinite radius and circumference, then there's no difference between the Bad Wolf, the experience of infinity, and the Doctor himself: eternity. The Master's problem isn't madness, not even the madness of war: it's his belief that there's a fundamental and insurmountable difference between him and anything else. The Master believes that he's alone. He is mistaken.

They sing: "There's no discouragement/ Shall make him once relent/ His first avowed intent/ To be a pilgrim." They sing: "Then fancies fly away,/ He'll fear not what men say,/ He'll labor night and day/ To be a pilgrim." They sing: "*Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, Sed nomine tuo da gloriam.*" "Give glory, God, give glory, not for us, God, but for Your name." Is this the stupid faith of boys heading off to war? Or is it something only John Smith is strong enough to show us?

**X: Blink**



"Blink" is one of those *Doctor Who* stories that makes me wish I were a fan of the show in the historical context. Tell me if I'm wrong, but it *feels* very *Who*. It doesn't do a lot for me, because I'm not here for the *Who*; I'm here for the bullshit philosophy. I like it, like I like episodes of shows I don't watch, but that delight and excitement and screaming that people do when they watch this -- I miss out on it. So an abridged take on this: the Weeping Angels are played by actors, which means that whenever we see them, they're not moving even, though they could be, because they're played by actors, except we're looking at them, through the screen, so they can't. And that's brilliant. I think there's something to be said for having Sally Sparrow, whom I liked quite a lot, woven into this very confusing five-dimensional freakout where people are constantly getting moved around her like chess pieces, and she has to keep up. That's gotta feel like drowning, you know? And she's good at it. But if you can see the physics of this, moving like those LSD spider webs, it's so neat: people pop out five feet from your left and end up five feet from your right, but *thirty years back*. And you're the still point around which all of this is happening: you're quantum-locked, like in movies where people take drugs and everything happens around them and they don't move. Sally's the main character, so we never blink while looking at her, so she stays safe. That's fun.

I think it's something that they're called "weeping angels," and that they fence Sally around just as badly as the Lonely Angel does, vis-à-vis the chaos he inflicts on the people around him. When the Doctor comes into your world and tells you to run, or to duck, get ready for things to start folding and unfolding from unexpected directions, and don't blink. This is concretized in the end, with the weeping angels literally surrounding Sally in the three dimensions as the TARDIS whisks her away. And of course, there's the old Gollum story, where they are quantum-locked now on each other, stuck in time just like the Aubertide Family, or the Carrionite Witches, for all eternity: "Evil can't look at itself." Which is...pithy, to say the least, but certainly sheds some light on the finale, again. The only way you get clear, the only way you can work with your Master instead of letting him age you prematurely and control you like a poppet, is to look at him and see him for what he is. Evil is just confusion of purpose: it's no coincidence that the Doctor defeats the Master when he's at his most powerful; that's him taking on the Master again for his own, by looking at him, by loving him, by letting him out of the box and back into the light.

**XI: Utopia/The Sound of Drums/Last of the Time Lords**

Which brings us to the good old, bad old Master, and the good old bad old three-parter that brought him to us. You've already seen it -- or you'd better have -- if you're reading this, so you probably have some strong opinions about it. I dunno. I respect the ideas and themes being presented, but I feel like they've already been treated so well that subjecting them to a haphazard season like this is a funny way to go. Mostly, it seems to have pissed people off, which I also respect, because there are a billion problems here, but on paper, I like it. I like Professor Yana, and I like Harry Saxon, and I like the Master -- what they are, and how and why they love, and how they become the fixed point around which the Doctor finds himself turning. If he can't get Rose back, then the only thing that could eclipse her in importance would be Gallifrey -- even a jagged, ugly, nasty piece of home like the Master. I like the way the Doctor loves him, and vice versa, in ways that they could never love their Companions. I like the way he so radically, completely, diametrically, diagonally, opposes everything about the Doctor, like a magnificent apophatic checklist.

The Doctor coexists in a stewardship relationship to humanity -- he protects its development and keeps its timeline integrity. Long before the end of his world, this was true. Meanwhile, the Master creates a self-destroying paradox in which humanity is constantly devouring itself. He pollutes both its being and its timeline. The Master's relationship to humans, as his name implies, is authoritative; the Doctor exerts no degree of "control" over humanity in the way the Master doesn't think twice about attempting. Only the Master would think of humans as children, to be manipulated and destroyed as he sees fit -- the Doctor sees them as stupid apes, wonderful creatures, but never as his "children." I think he would find that entire idea disgusting (for his Shadow, the Master, maybe thus tempting). If you were creating the anti-Doctor, you could do little better to warp his relationship with Earth than to describe it as parental -- and by the same token, to make the Companion/Doctor relationship abusive, murderous, sexually perverse, or emotionally crippling in the way that Lucy's relationship with the Master is shown to be. When Martha went down on her knees, I screamed, and kept screaming, until she started to laugh.

The Doctor goes so far in the other direction, in the end, that he allows himself -- the strongest, most beautiful being in existence, this thing that we're capable of, in those tiny moments of grace that are our tendency -- to be abused, mortified, shrunken and humiliated. Shaven and chained, like Aslan, because he knows that Martha, and humanity, will save him. In the end, it's the strength of the Doctor's sacrifice that saves the

universe, and buys him the time. Can you imagine putting yourself at the mercy of stupid apes and knowing that they can do it on their own? It's the Third Testament all over again. The Doctor even gives up the notoriety and glory that it would bring him, when he admits it's best that nobody remember. In that lost year the Master was wiped away from him and his two hearts beat in tandem again, I'd say he earned his Jesus pose, because he found the truest expression of his power: to sacrifice it, and himself, to allow himself to be saved, caught in free-fall, by the people he's meant to lead and protect, to be debased by his evil twin, by the Jagraffess he always comes so close to becoming, by the wave of chaos he could be so easily. "Know your enemy": even Martha knows that there has to come a time when you give yourself up into your enemy's hands. And in the end, Martha forgives her Judas for putting love above survival. She gives her flowers.

But because the Master is a part of the Doctor -- the Faith part that takes a Neitzschean pleasure in its power -- he can't ever die completely. No second chances, no return to egg-form for another try. No second chances. The Master is just another Reinette, in a way -- somebody who's walked the Doctor so completely that the edges go fuzzy: "We are the same." I'd say that, beyond even the strength of sacrifice, the Doctor's knowing that this balance is forever going to be his problem is a truer expression of power; I also think that it's Martha who saved him from the Master's road, after Rose broke his dependent, human heart. Thinking you can really kill the Master? That's just a little boy, shooting at straw men, tears running down. The Doctor will always be scary, and he'll always need somebody to stop him, because that's how the Master happens: it's a natural consequence of power. That's "42" happening, forty-two minutes at a time, for nine hundred years and counting; ask the poor Family of Blood, or even the Weeping Angels, in their Schrödinger hell. It's the humanity in the Doctor, which Martha and all the Companions have forged and will continue to forge, that keep him on that path, for the most part. Life is balance and it's a constant working: grace is a wave that never breaks. They seem like two great faces, or a very large vase, but in fact they're just lines on paper, drawn in black and white, played on a stage by very tiny, very sexy men. It looks like this:

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But it's really just two dots and a curve. It was you who made it real. The Doctor and the Master in conflict was the two sides of a God, fighting for a position from which to perceive his relationship to humanity. The

Doctor, who doctors, and the Master, who masters. The open hand and the closed fist. Mercy and Judgment. Either the Last of the Timelords is so in charge of humanity that he can put it into a paradoxical self-destructive loop, like toys, for his own enjoyment and mad quest for war...or he can sacrifice his power, authority, and pride, and let humanity save him. It's the smart kind of faith again, where stories and songs bring you strength from strange places; it's the kind where you realize you can save yourself.

Imperfect execution, I'll admit, but the elements are there. That last is why I don't have a problem with the Messiah bullshit, or the glowing Tinkerbell Jesusiness of it all: it's not about the Doctor becoming super-powerful and not learning his lesson, but about the moment *just before* that, about that forgotten year, when he realized that there was nothing to be lost in handing humanity the reins. He knows that grace operates for him too, and that, in jumping, he has a chance to save everybody, even the Master. Because the Master is not a foe in the classic sense: he's a brother, someone with whom the Doctor's relationship verges on the romantic, and a necessary element of both the universe and the Doctor himself. When the Face of Boe says, "You are not alone," it could be a wish: the Master is just the plutonium inside.

If the Master in this story is one-half of a Timelord, then John Simm is the perfect person to place opposite Tennant. From the Martha/Lucy, light/dark Companion stuff, to the childish ADD, he's a match physically and energetically as much as philosophically or psychologically, as a character. It makes me wonder what an Eccleston-era Master could possibly have been like; Severus Snape is my best guess. Saxon even takes on a warped version the burden of Ten's loneliness, most especially in his need for Ten to hear the drums of war. All along, he's been convinced that it's a Timelord thing, and that Ten's just denying him out of some kind of pique. If the drums are his alone, then he's a madman: he is evil for its own sake, destruction uninformed by any directing or rational force. Which may or may not be true, but Saxon's not allowed to think that: evil can't look at itself. However, if Ten can hear them too, they'll be united. The conflict has to be resolved either way, because the point of stories is to resolve conflicts, but if the Master is on top when that happens, we won't have any more stories. And the Doctor's never heard the drums: in this case (alone, perhaps) the Master is a tree without a forest. "It's just you," the Doctor says. The Doctor is the true Timelord, and the drums are just a sign of the Master's illness. And the Doctor weeps for him, and so did you, and don't try to deny it.

But that's not the most beautiful reversal and redemption in this piece. There's another one we're missing ("If this is alchemy there will be three kisses, remember that?"), and it has to do with the believer's responsibility to the divine. Gods thrive on belief, like we all do, in the same way that forests thrive on trees, or text on words, or images on sight. In the Big Three, this belief is part of the same postal network that brings messages and babies from the Lord, strength in times of crisis, and the rest: it's a ladder, stretching down from Heaven and up from Earth, and it's ridden by messengers. Chief among these are the Archangels, who have responsibilities in Creation beyond simply messengering. They form a ladder of their own, and they rush up and down it like functionaries, doing this and that; if angels are voices, archangels are hands, and strong backs. In this story, they bring about the most beautiful reversal of all: where once the heart of the TARDIS took infinity, all the Everything of time and space, and gave it spiritual expression through Rose Tyler, the Archangel Network -- made by humans, operated by humans, tainted by the Master just as the TARDIS is -- takes all the mental power of seven billion souls and gives it physical expression. Gallifrey gave us the TARDIS, and the TARDIS gave us the Bad Wolf; but it's the Good Wolf that saves the Doctor in the end, and that's all manmade. I wonder what he felt, in that moment. If he thought of her, just on the other side of the wall, listening. If he said goodbye.

XII : )

You've been sweet, and patient, and I've been unimaginably lucky. This LINDA we've built, and the way it continues on, makes me very proud. I've become a lifer, I know that. But I want to say something awesome. I want the big finish, and I feel like that is impossible without having more stories to tell you. When you saw the TARDIS coming down the pike toward Donna, and you drew in your breath along with a million other people, I was there, saying "Doctor." The show is the fixed point for a lot of things. I've seen Glaswegians fall in love with Scottish Vixens, and women battle illness and draw strength from this LINDA we've built, and I've watched you people argue the most bizarre nitpicks of all time, and I was amazed, and I never stopped being amazed. But what is it about this show, this show in particular, that does this? Is it just the history? Everybody can tell you the Doctor they remember from childhood; list their Top Five Companions. Is it the Wild Magic of the Doctor himself, the way you never know quite what you're going to get, but that you know it's going to be fun? That you never waste time when you love this show? I still don't know, but it's cool.

One thing I think it is not, though, is the Companion setup. I don't like to think that the show, this weird phenomenon that's twice as old as yours truly, comes down to escapism, to the romance of neglecting and avoiding and running away from life. I mean, I realize that it's more than that -- I can't seem to shut the hell up about all the other things it is -- but the thing about stories, like dreams, is that they're all you. In Jungian terms, the Companion is the Ego and the Doctor is the Self and the TARDIS is the Ego-Self Axis, and if you ask me why, as an atheist, I'm so obsessed with writing and reading about religion, that's the pat answer that I won't give you, because it's too small. It's a collection of trees that can't actually express the forest. But I think in human development there's something that leads us on, some gift of the world, that gives us guidance toward becoming whole. I think there's something, a Doctor, that wants us to look in those dark corners and tease the mysteries out and become strong enough to see things the way they are, without all the magic and hope and fear and ugliness that we project on them, because when we do that, we're abusing ourselves, because the world inside our head is where we actually live, and the best we can hope for is to work until it matches the world outside our heads as closely as possible. So I've never found it weird or particularly interesting to cast *Doctor Who* as either a meditative experience of the divine or as a description of individuation, the process of growing up. Those are all just a bunch of words for fairy tales, which are all just versions of the Quest, and the Quest never ends. You shouldn't go around kicking trees when you're in the middle of the forest, because if you miss the forest, you're screwed, because it's a...*really* awesome forest.

But the neatest thing about looking at story that way is that you get to be whoever you want. And when you come back, you might be surprised whom you've turned into. I've been Lucy, and I've been Edmund -- that was hard -- and...the past few years I've been Susan as a cover story for trying to become Peter. So I'm asking, like the Caterpillar: in this story, in the webs and Quests it's spun and keeps spinning around you, who are you? Are you lovely Sally Sparrow, at the mercy of fate, keeping your back strong? Are you Adam Mitchell, incompetent at large? Are you wonderful Elton, spinning human connection out of the thinnest straw? Are you Rose, willing to try and try again to reach your highest self? Are you Martha, rooted in the real world, strong and indefatigable? Are you Captain Jack, the Companion Companion companions? Donna, who still has so much to teach us about living in a world with trees and forests both?

Or is that just another way of hiding behind story? Talking about the

Quest instead of heading out on it? The secret is, like in any story, you're all of them, and none. All Yvonne, Jackie, Joan Redfern needed to be were Yvonne, Jackie, and Joan. That's enough. It's not much of a story, but that's kind of the point. Stories end, and you don't. But in those tiny moments of grace to which you tend, if you have the grace to accept them, at those rare times in the angle of the light where the words reach out and lift you up, you are touching something bigger than anything that could ever harm or stop you. You are the Bad Wolf.

And because it can't be said enough: you are not alone.